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The Rural Development Program

(With Emphasis on Extension's Responsibilities)

What Rural Development Is.

Rural development is a cooperative long-range program aimed at improving opportunities for the approximately one-fourth of our farm families with cash incomes of less than \$1,000 a year. It is intended to appraise the local conditions that usually contribute to the low-income situation and to develop programs and activities to alleviate the problems involved. The program will be based chiefly on organizing local initiative and supporting it with adequate State and Federal assistance and encouragement. It is an integrated undertaking that involves research, education, credit, technical assistance, business, industry, employment services, and vocational training. On a local basis, it involves a coordinated approach by civic, business, and industrial leaders, farm organizations, schools, churches, community and service clubs, as well as local, State, and Federal agencies.

Rural development work is based on the recognized interest of all people in their situation and their willingness, desire, and ability to do something about it. Stated briefly, it is aimed at developing the agricultural and human resources of approximately 5 million farm people with low incomes.

Rural development work involves both education and organized action. It is based on the philosophy that people will make wise decisions if they are properly informed about their alternative opportunities and if their abilities are developed so that they can take advantage of the opportunities available or made available to them.

Objectives of Rural Development.

The broad objective of the rural development program is to help rural people with low incomes to achieve their own goals. The core of the rural development program is contained in President Eisenhower's message to the Congress: "We must open wider the doors of opportunity to our million and a half farm families with extremely low incomes -- for their own well-being and for the good of our country and all our people."

Purposes It Will Serve.

The rural development program is designed to improve family incomes and to bring about the fundamental growth and development of the people involved through the attainment, utilization, and enjoyment of a better standard of living.

More specifically, the purpose of the program is to:

1. Stimulate coordinated action in an organized way on the problems contributing to low incomes in rural areas.
2. Meet the needs of low-income farmers and part-time farmers by expanding and adapting extension work to this group.
3. Encourage farm, business, and other leadership to take local responsibility and to unite in efforts for further development of low-income counties and their human resources.
4. Provide additional credit for low-income and part-time farmers where appropriate.
5. Increase technical assistance, provide more effective employment counseling, and the like.
6. Encourage the expansion of opportunities for vocational guidance and other training for young people in low-income rural areas.
7. Encourage the expansion and improvement of other public facilities and services.
8. Encourage the expansion of industry in rural low-income areas.
9. Develop research and investigations essential to finding the best solutions to problems in such areas and the best ways to conduct such coordinated efforts for improvement.

How the Program Operates.

The following steps are involved:

1. The launching of a broad, aggressive, well-coordinated assault on the problems associated with low income.
2. Pilot operations to be launched in 50 of the 1,000 low-income counties in the first year and others to be added as experience is gained.
3. Established activities that are already contributing--such as community development--to be strengthened and new measures added.
4. Broad, representative State and county rural development committees are to guide such programs. These programs may be community, county, or area in scope.

5. All Government agencies (Federal, State, and county), organizations, and groups that serve agriculture are to cooperate in an integrated attack on the low-income problem.
6. The responsibility for the program is to be vested in local people, their organizations and services.
7. Research to discover more about the dominant factors causing low incomes in the pilot counties and to develop practical ways through which the problems involved may be more effectively overcome.

Differences Between Rural Development and Other Programs.

Rural development is a separate program. It is not just an extended farm and home unit approach, nor is it just a community development undertaking. It differs from these in several ways:

Rural Development

Cooperative, unified effort among many Government, business, religious, civic, and other groups.

Aimed specifically at low-income families. Includes the use of the farm and home unit approach.

Rural Development

Involves more than community development.

Conducted largely on county or area basis.

Total, integrated attack.

Farm and Home Unit Approach

Sponsored and conducted by Extension Service.

Aimed at all families, not just low-income families.

Community Development

In a pilot county community development may be one part of a total rural development program.

Conducted on a community basis.

One educational method of conducting rural development work. Aimed at all families.

Immediate Problems.

Lack of income.
Lack of motivation.
Lack of resources.
Lack of knowledge.
Lack of nonfarm jobs.

More than half of the full-time farmers in about 1,000 counties are dependent upon income from small, low-income farms. A significant proportion of these farm families will probably remain in agriculture. They need counsel and assistance to increase their efficiency, their incomes, and their standards of living.

An important part of the solution of the problems of low-income farm people lies outside commercial agriculture. Opportunities for increased income through part-time and nonfarm employment are not fully recognized and utilized. The key problem appears to be a lack of sufficient information and guidance as to management of the farm, the home, and the finances, as well as off-farm opportunities.

How Is a Rural Development Program Initiated?

The State Rural Development Committee, usually organized by the dean of the agricultural college in cooperation with other Federal and State agencies and organizations, is representative of both agricultural and nonagricultural interests having a major concern with the development of disadvantaged rural areas. This committee selects pilot counties, suggests formation of county Rural Development Committees, and consults with county committees on formulation of county programs.

The initiation and development of the program are accomplished by voluntary actions of the participating agencies and organizations. Timetables and coordination are worked out by the State and county Rural Development Committees.

The unique feature of rural development, and the principal thing that makes it different from most other programs in the past, is that it is an integrated attack upon all the facets of the problems involved and gives maximum opportunity for local initiative and talent.

Extension's Responsibility for Rural Development.

Section 8 of the Smith-Lever Act, as amended by Public Law 360, gives the Extension Service four major responsibilities in pilot counties:

- "(1) Intensive on-the-farm educational assistance to the farm families in appraising and resolving their problems;
- "(2) Assistance and counseling to local groups in appraising resources for capability of improvement in agriculture or introduction of industry designed to supplement farm income;
- "(3) Cooperation with other agencies and groups in furnishing . . . information as to . . . employment opportunities, particularly to farm families having underemployed workers; and
- "(4) in cases where the farm family . . . finds it advisable to seek a new farming venture, the providing of information, advice, and counsel in connection with making such change."

Farmers who expect to continue in full-time farming need information of a technical nature that is directly applicable to their farming situations. They need more educational assistance in improving their managerial skills; educational assistance in deciding upon such things as whether or not to enlarge their farms, to own or hire more equipment, to add more livestock, and how best to finance these things and get them done.

Low-income farm families require intensive educational help in working out their own plans in accordance with their own resources, their own values, and their own situations. However, the need for work of this type is not limited to those who have the desire, the ability, and the resources to develop successful full-time farm businesses. Nonfarm and part-time farming opportunities need to be evaluated when they appear as more promising alternatives.

In the pilot counties qualified personnel will be employed to work on specific problems with the farm families and the communities of the areas involved and to assist local Rural Development Committees. In these counties it is planned that county committees will be established with a broad base of participation; materials will be assembled for analysis and for planning cooperative efforts on the part of all agencies concerned; new methods of working with farm people of limited opportunities will be explored and tested; and community programs and goals will be developed.

In short, Extension has the responsibility of employing its usual techniques of helping people to help themselves; specifically doing intensive work on the farm with low-income families; and servicing State, county, and area committees in any manner feasible to get the work under way.

Who Should Be Involved in the Rural Development Program?

It is obvious from the nature and scope of the rural development program that the work of several units of the Federal Government relate to it; such as:

- Department of Agriculture.
- Department of Commerce.
- Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.
- Department of Labor.
- Department of the Interior.
- Farm Credit Administration, and others.

Each of these and its associated State and local agencies is in a position to make important contributions to the rural development program in some or all of the pilot counties.

According to the Rural Development Program News, August 1956, the following agencies of the U. S. Department of Agriculture will put special resources or efforts into pilot counties in order to help Rural Development Committees and others with their programs:

Federal Extension Service.
Soil Conservation Service.
Farmers Home Administration.
Agricultural Research Service.
Agricultural Marketing Service.
Forest Service.
Rural Electrification Administration.

More detailed information on USDA agency responsibilities may be found in the above-mentioned publication.

Nongovernmental groups especially important to State and county programs are farm organizations and religious, civic, business, radio, newspaper, and credit groups.

The Pilot County Program.

Assuming that the area or county has been selected, personnel employed, and a county Rural Development Committee organized, the following suggestions may be useful:

1. Gather and interpret data on local conditions by using such sources of information as experiment stations, Bureau of the Census, and chambers of commerce.
2. Enlist the aid of local groups in thinking through the problems and suggesting workable solutions.
3. Assist the county committee in evaluating the local situation, planning for local action, organizing subcommittees, and coordinating the services of all agencies and groups which can contribute to the solution of the problem.
4. Present data and alternative solutions and available services to county committee groups.
5. Decide on a major problem or problems to be attacked.
6. As the program develops, use those elements that have proved most successful in further expansion of efforts.

Extension Counseling with Low-Income Families.

A. General considerations.

1. Keep in mind certain characteristics that distinguish the low-income group; such as:
 - (a) Low level of education.

- (b) Limited participation in formal community or county-wide organizations.
 - (c) Considerable dependence on friends and neighbors for information and advice on recommended practices.
 - (d) Values and goals that are frequently different from those of other groups.
2. Suggest applications of improved technology in steps and sequences that are feasible, considering costs and the amount of learning that is necessary.
 3. Help families to plan and carry out an activity that will meet a specific need--avoiding too much technical help or too much material assistance at first in order not to discourage local organized self-help.
 4. Help obtain recognition for a family's achievement in solving a problem. Once the family has done one thing well, it may be encouraged to undertake more difficult problems.
 5. Best community or countywide projects are those that command general interest and provide evidence of tangible benefits; such as:
 - (a) Development of new sources of employment.
 - (b) Improving local public services--health facilities, schools, churches, and the like.
 - (c) Local community improvement projects.
 - (d) Organization of better local marketing facilities.
- B. For those interested in outside or part-time employment off the farm, provide appropriate counsel, including advice on employment procedures and services.

Extension Teaching Methods Adapted to Low-Income Families.

1. Locate natural leaders in whom the people have trust and solicit their cooperation.
2. Locate individual families and make informal, get-acquainted visits.
3. Establish relations with the family strong enough to gain their confidence before attempting any major work.
4. Interview families and help them to appraise their natural and human resources and to work on their problems.

5. Work with them individually and in small groups of neighboring families.
6. In teaching better farm and home methods, use organized community groups, clubs, or committees whenever most of the low-income people are involved.
7. Train youth and adult local leaders to know, accept, and carry out responsibilities of leadership.
8. Give educational leadership in youth programs and assist young people in exploring career opportunities.
9. Start with what the families want or have some interest in.

Reporting Developments.

Furnish information on progress to newspapers and radio, and report accomplishments to State and national cooperating groups.

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